The Dam that Mabry Built (Bull Creek District Park)

Dam in Bull Creek District Park constructed by Gen. W.H. Mabry

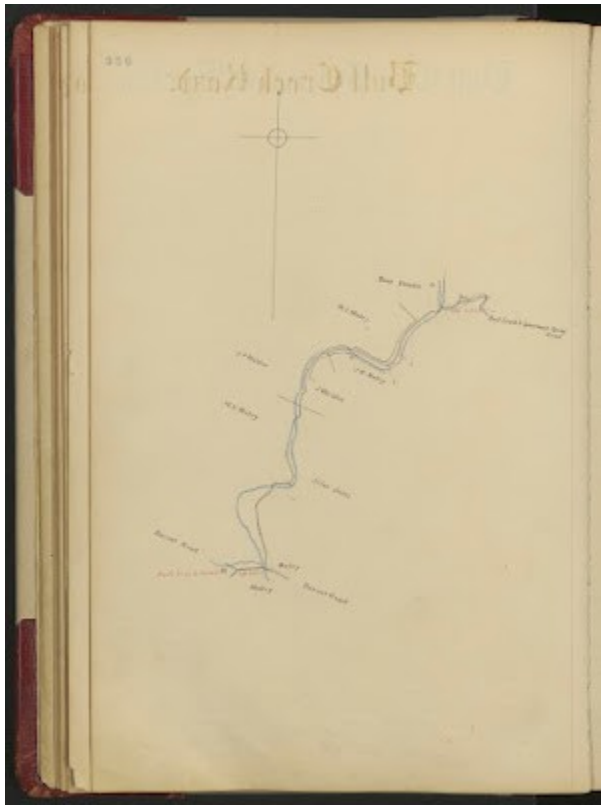
You've seen it, may have used it as a photo-op for a selfie. The dam in Bull Creek District park, about 500 feet downstream from the parking lot off Lakewood Drive near the intersection of Loop 360. It was built by Gen. Woodford Haywood Mabry (as in Camp Mabry) on land he owned along Bull Creek. Yes, Mabry was a landowner on Bull Creek. When the county road surveys were done in 1898-1902, his holdings on Bull Creek were mapped. His name pops up in the news related to road construction on Bull Creek Road: "The petition of J. W. Beard et.al. and protest of Gen. W. H. Mabry, on Bull Creek road, was up for consideration, and after having heard some evidence thereon, the court decided to go in a body and view said proposed road and adjourned until today at 10 a.m."[1]. This was no doubt related to the necessary roadwork on the old Bull Creek Rd. (route of today's 2222) when parts were flooded by the creation of Lake McDonald.

Camp Mabry was established in the early 1890s as a summer encampment of the Texas Volunteer Guard, a forerunner of the Texas National Guard. Mabry became Adjutant General of Texas under Governor Hogg in 1891; Camp Mabry was named in his honor in 1892. With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Mabry resigned his office to become a colonel in the First Texas Infantry.

Mabry built the dam ca. 1892, the year he signed a lease agreement with John Walden's widow, Rachel, to lease her land to impound water from his dam[2]. It was traffic to and from the old Walden family mill upstream that created the wagon ruts you see in Bull Creek in the park. You can read more about that in Clementine Walden Jackson's memoir (see link below *Water Powered Mill on Bull Creek*).

Why did Mabry want a dam? We can only speculate it was recreational. His fishing trips with Gov. Hogg and friends were the stuff of the news. In 1894 the paper reported: “A Fishing Party. Yesterday afternoon Governor Hogg and a party of friends went up to Bull Creek on a fishing frolic which will possibly continue throughout the present week if the fish bite well and the bait holds out .. the party have provisions along to last an ordinary crowd a month.” On the trip, Gen. W.H. Mabry.[3] Other news cynically speculated fishing was not the only goal. From an 1896 article: “That Little Fishing Party. No one understood why .. Col. Hogg [Hogg's term as governor ended in 1895] .. and Gen. Mabry should rendezvous on Bull Creek Thursday .. No one believes that Col. Hogg would fight mosquitoes two or three days for the fun of sitting on the banks of Bull Creek fishing for perch.”[4] Maybe some creek side politics also took place!

The lease to impound water was for 10 years but Gen. Mabry died in 1899 in Cuba in the Spanish-American War. The 1898 county road maps show a number of “Mabry” along Bull Creek. Hard to believe they weren’t somehow related (more research needed). But what we do know is the dam Gen. W.H. Mabry built for his fishing buddies is still there today.



Travis County road maps of 1898-1902 showing Mabry and Walden properties along Bull Creek

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[4]

See also ..

Water Powered Mill on Bull Creek, https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com/2017/03/water-powered-mill-on-bull-creek_15.html

What does Bull Creek Road have to do with Bull Creek? https://traviscountyhistorical.blogspot.com/2017/06/what-does-bull-creek-road-have-to-do_9.html